



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Randall J. Butler
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
Portland District
P.O. Box 2946
Portland, OR 97208-2946

Subject: Consultation and Conference on the Columbia River Channel
Improvements Project

Dear Colonel Butler:

Enclosed please find the final U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) biological and conference opinions (Opinions) on the Columbia River Channel Improvements Project (Project). These Opinions respond to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer's (Corps) January 3, 2002, biological assessment and request for consultation and conferencing, and the Corps' April 22, 2002, amendment letter to the biological assessment.

The Service's Endangered Species Act (Act) review of the Project addresses effects to listed and proposed species that utilize the lower Columbia River, estuary, and river mouth. Our review focuses on those Project impacts that may directly and/or indirectly affect listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and proposed coastal cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki clarki*). Effects to bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and Columbian white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus leucurus*) from Project ecosystem restoration actions are also reviewed. Our analysis consisted of an examination of the current status and factors for decline of proposed and listed species, the environmental baseline in the action area, the effects of the proposed action, and the cumulative effects. Based on this analysis, the Service concludes that the proposed action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of bull trout, coastal cutthroat trout, bald eagles, or

Columbian white-tailed deer. No critical habitat has been designated or proposed for these species, therefore no critical habitat will be affected by the Project actions.


These Service Opinions are not an analysis of all possible Project-related effects to the lower Columbia River ecosystem. The Corps' initial environmental impact statement (EIS), prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, and their upcoming supplemental EIS will be more comprehensive examinations of the Project's broader environmental impacts.

Since the fall of 2000, the Service, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the Corps, and sponsoring Ports have worked closely together in a collaborative fashion to address the complex endangered species issues associated with the Project. We used an independent science panel to review analytical methods and scientific data associated with the Project. We cooperatively analyzed the best available science, determined the Project's effects to listed and proposed species, and developed methods to minimize and avoid Project impacts. We strengthened our Project effects analysis via a comprehensive monitoring program, and agreed to a long-term adaptive management process to review new information and make necessary Project adjustments. We developed numerous ecosystem research projects to benefit our knowledge of the Columbia River ecosystem, and collaboratively developed a number of restoration features that will aid in the long-term conservation of Columbia River listed and proposed species.

In conclusion, our agencies have worked closely together in a collaborative fashion to address the complex endangered species issues associated with this Project. This unique process has allowed for a successful consultation and conferencing. We look forward to our future joint participation with NMFS, Corps, and Ports in the adaptive management process, implementing the Project's monitoring program, and evaluating the success of the research and restoration actions.

If you have any questions regarding these Opinions, please call me or Doug Young, Service Project Manager, at 503-231-6179.

Sincerely,

 5/20/02
Kemper M. McMaster Date
State Supervisor
Oregon State Office